



Weeks Bay

National Estuarine Research Reserve



Location: Along Mobile Bay's eastern shore, about 40 miles southeast of Mobile, Alabama

Date Designated: 1986

Area Protected: 9,317 acres

Web Address: weeksbayreserve.com

Management: Daily oversight is provided by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. NOAA's Office for Coastal Management provides funding, national guidance, and technical assistance.

Access and Infrastructure

- The Weeks Bay Visitor Center offers the public opportunities to learn about coastal habitats through its exhibits, live animal displays, and collections of animals and regional plants.
- The reserve includes two boardwalks: one located behind the visitor center leading to Weeks Bay, and the second, the Kurt G. Wintermeyer Nature Trail, connecting to the Fish River and offering easy access to the unique pitcher plant bog habitat.
- The resource center's boat ramp provides easy access to the waters of Weeks Bay and the Fish River.

The Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve encompasses more than 9,000 acres of tidal and forested wetlands within a small estuary and is fringed with a variety of wetland habitats that receive fresh water from the Fish and Magnolia Rivers. Fire-dependent pitcher plant bogs contain myriad rare species and are easily accessible on the reserve's self-guided nature trails. Additionally, the site contains habitats that support many other rare and endangered species, including the brown pelican, eastern indigo snake, and Alabama red-bellied turtle.

Reserve researchers study and monitor water quality, weather conditions, and pollution effects, and facilitate transfer of this information among other researchers, coastal managers, and the public. The reserve's training program often partners with other sites, such as the Grand Bay reserve in Mississippi, to assist constituents as they work to understand and use the important information obtained through the research.

NOAA Office for Coastal Management

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Interesting Things to Know

- Throughout the school year, the reserve offers free, hands-on environmental education programs designed specifically for each grade level.
- The Weeks Bay Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing support and advocacy for the reserve, assists with education and outreach programs for adults, such as a guided kayak expedition through the bay. The foundation became a nationally accredited land trust in 2009.
- The protected waters of Weeks Bay are an ecologically significant nursery for a wide variety of commercially and recreationally important fish and shellfish species.
- Research produced at Weeks Bay reserve informs coastal land use and resilience planning in one of the fastest-growing regions along the Gulf Coast.

About the Programs

The nation's 29 research reserves represent a tremendous asset, protecting over 1.3 million acres and providing habitat where plants and wildlife thrive. Community benefits include recreation, flood protection, and water filtration. Because the following programs are offered at each reserve, the system is able to make an environmental impact at the local level, as well as nationally.

Stewardship. Site protection and enhancement are part of every research reserve. Activities may include managing land and water resources, restoring habitat, controlling invasive species, maintaining biodiversity, and reducing environmental stressors.

Research. Reserve research is focused on how environmental factors—such as nutrient loading, climate change, invasive species, and storms—impact coastal ecosystems. The System-Wide Monitoring Program, or SWMP, provides long-term data on water quality, weather, biological communities, habitat, and land-use and land-cover characteristics. This combination of research and data provides a strong, science-based foundation for addressing coastal management challenges.

Training. To provide the community with the information and skills needed to integrate coastal science into local decision-making and everyday lives, reserves provide specialized courses and information. Reserve training professionals are active in community planning and improvement initiatives.

Education. Local data generated at the reserve provide students with a firsthand experience of local environmental conditions. Educators lead student, teacher, and citizen field trips that are life-changing experiences, as participants see, feel, and smell what makes an estuary one of the most remarkable places in the world.

To learn more, visit coast.noaa.gov/nerrs.

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